Dichmont

KOOTENAI BROWN SPENT COLORFUL CAREER IN WEST

(By Annette Hamilton Christie from ? Newspaper)

Under the low-hanging clouds of a gloomy April day, this year, was written the closing chaper of one of the most romantic stories that ever wove a vivid thread into the fabric of western history.

Willows hung heavily in their long sleep on the shores of the mountain lake. Stark beside its cold depths cottonwoods drew together in a chill world. From the heights age-old pines looked down. The earlier chapers of the story about to be ended, were no secret to them.

An open grave waits at the end of a newly-cut trail. There are two others in the same enclosure in the secluded spot below the highway, but the grasses of many summers lie thickly over them. They mark the last resting place of two who loved in the long ago before Waterton Park had been marked as a national play ground.

Over snow-covered roads a cortege winds its way from the Roman Catholic Church at the townsite several miles distant, and from the highway to a low-lying road that ends at the lakeshore. There are the few pioneers gathered; there are government officials, for the woman gone at more than 90 years was a ward of the Dominion. Trucks carry numbers of strangers attending the last rites for a Cree woman, who as the second wife of John George "Kootenai" Brown, was the last link with a remote past in the mountain country.

Respect had been hers when her British-born husband lived. "My wife, Mrs. Brown," he was wont to say, adding to the rare friend to whom he concealed a measure of confidence, "her face may be black, but her heart is as white as the whitest diamond."

And Kootenai knew, for his early years were spent in the shadow of the court of the great Victoria, to whose household his father was attached, and who regarded the young man with favor. A tangible expression of this came on his twenty-first birthday when he was appointed her ensign-bearer. A resident of Waterton Park treasures the worn document across its corner the now faded signature of England's queen, appointing "John George Brown, gentleman, son of John George Brown, gentleman", to the service of Her Majesty.

But the life of the court was not long for a man who was to see the stars from many lands, and follow strange paths to a grave in a distant part of the Empire.

Early years found him in India. Graduate of Trinity College, officier of the 8th King's Liverpool, the setting was for a different play from the one eventually enacted. Intolerant of a smirch on the honor of his household, with a temper of rapier swiftness, he shot down a fellow-officer in India. About to take the second life, the tread of a Sepoy Guard halted seift hustice, and counselled flight. In the disguise of a native he made his way from the inland post to the sea, barely in time to find a wind-jammer with a cargo of nitrates setting out from Calcutta. He shipped before the mast on the voyage to South America, and when the vessel was wrecked off the coast of the Falkland Islands,

made his way to the mainland of Argentina in a small boat.

Work on an estaminita was not to his taste. If ever a man set out to live his own life in his own way, and came near success in the undertaking, Brown was that man. While running a pony express provided a varied experience of the southern continent, there was the consuming fire of adventure to be reckoned with, and he found his way north. Mexico . . . Texas . . . on.

Strange countries. Strange people. No friends. Through his long life distrust was a first impulse. Many are the stories of his prowess with his gun, and the readiness to defend himself that made for sundry notches on his weapon.

Reaching the northern states he traveled Montana, when at Fort Benton he accepted an invitation to a poker game in a saloon and accused, of having cheated. In later days, and on more familiar ground, Brown was loud in declaring that no man could question his honesty. At Fort Benton he was a stranger, suspected. Slyly drawing his accuser's attention, he drew sharply and shot him, shooting out the lights in rapid succession. Under cover of the confusion he made his escape, as swiftly freed his horse, and with a flying leap to the loosened saddle made his way into the night.

Weary days and weary nights to westward followed. Worn rider and spent horse knew only brief rests on the way to the mountains. They skirted little used trails, avoiding the sweep and insecurity of the plains. In those little known ways lay safety. Across a lake and the fugitive found himself on a summer evening on a

Lakes lay before him, one shining expanse beyond another. Mountains reared protecting peaks, Dusk and the chill of mountain darkness crept on . . . Hunger . . . Weariness. He felt someone near, though no sound reached his ears. A hand to the ever-ready gun . . . And then he was confronted with a white squaw, the rare beauty of an Indian tribe.

From her the hunted traveler learned he was again on British soil, and from her he learned, too, what it meant to be befriended without meriting it. In the roof of the shack where her tribesmen were camped she hid him until morning, when she sent them in search of the horses, allowing him an interval in which to seek other quarters. Up Pass Creek she hid him, providing him with food until a later time when her people, the Bloods, accepted him as their friend.

It was to be expected that the wanderer would marry the Indian girl, and although he wandered far and wide in Western Canada, Waterton remained home to him to the end of a long life. In charge of pack trains for the C.P.R. he was known over railroad routes, notably along the line from Moyie City to Cranbrook in the early years of this century. He had then been in Canada nearly 40 years.

It was on this road that an official of the railroad followed his pack train one day, noticing for some miles a small trickle of beans. Arriving at camp, he found Kootenai with a gun pushed menacingly against the cook, shouting that no one could call him a thief. One sack of beans was empty, and the cook was insisting that the packer had cached them against the coming winter's

need, and only the timely arrival of the official, able to vouch for the proof of the loss along the mountain, prevented tragedy.

Back to his lake country he always came. There he took land, kept his horses, traded for the I. G. Baker Co., in opposition to the Hudson's BayIt was home. When he lost his first wife in the '80's, he married the Cree girl, whom he purchases for five ponies.

Little is known of the two sons of his first marriage save that it is believed they live in the Caribou country. Of the children of the second wife, to whom he was married by Father Lacombe, none survived infancy.

This newcomer to the park sights the road toward a resting place. The old-timer, mentally at least, slows down. By the water's edge and along mountain paths as well as widened roads, shadows pass. They are of a courageous Indian girl, and a travel-stained Britisher, a squat figure on a buckskin pony, and the dignified, soldierly one of a long-haired man, first superintendent of Waterton National Park, 25 years ago.

Material sent by Mrs. Dichmont, Calgary.